HOMOSOCIAL TENSION IN AARON SISKIND'S *BILL LIPKIND 10*:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE MALE FORM AS OUTLIER

by

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ABSTRACT

The photograph *Bill Lipkind 10* (1960), by Aaron Siskind, provides a divergent narrative of the photographer. The photograph, which depicts a nude male, problematizes an artist and artwork traditionally seen as Abstract Expressionist in a culture of homophobic Post-War American art. Consideration of Siskind as a heterosexual Abstract Expressionist photographer has continued to restrict the complexity of his work while further entrenching this narrative of the artist. This thesis argues that in order to better "resolve the tension" within Siskind's photography, we must degender our understanding of the sexualized gaze. Rather than heterosexualizing or homosexualizing the image, I employ Eve Sedgwick's *homosocial* lens to analyze the photograph. This homosocial context is formed using in-depth analysis of the image, an exploration of previous scholarship of Siskind's work, the unique relationship between photographer and subject, and consideration of how an understanding of an artist's sexuality colors interpretation of image making. Furthermore, this thesis contextualizes Siskind within the Post-War American art world, proposing possible reasons for both the photograph's production as well as reasons for the gendered reading of such imagery. My analysis of *Bill Lipkind 10* also serves as a template for other works straddling what is straight enough for Post-War American art consideration and what is gay enough under Queer Theory's purview.

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INTRODUCTION

> *Almost inevitably there are tensions in the picture – tensions between the outside world and an inside world. For me a successful picture resolves these tensions without eliminating them.*
>
> — Aaron Siskind[1]

In the summer of 1960, while on his customary vacation to the coast, Aaron Siskind (1903-1991) photographed his dear friend William "Bill" Lipkind on the dunes of Martha's Vineyard. *Bill Lipkind 10*, one of the resulting photographs, shows Lipkind's bare legs positioned against the background of an expanding landscape. While not extraordinary in and of itself formally, the photograph's placement within Siskind's oeuvre as well as within the historical depiction of the male form raise the image beyond the mundane. More than a photograph of legs, the bare legs are indicative of the nakedness of the photograph's subject, a heterosexual male in the presence of a heterosexual photographer. This homosocial relationship (a term I will expand on) between artist and subject informs our reading of the image and allows for a richer understanding of gendered representation.[2]

Lipkind's nudity and the sexuality of both Lipkind and Siskind play an important role in the meanings of *Bill Lipkind 10* in the context of Post-War American art. In the decades preceding Siskind's 1960 series of Lipkind, the male nude had all but vanished from

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[1] Aaron Siskind, "This is My Best." *Art Photography* (June 1954): 16.

[2] I use "homosocial" following Eve Sedgwick to denote a heterosexual-male/heterosexual-male relationship, rather than the more general use of the term to denote situational groupings of like-sexed people such as the United States Congress or a football team. The application of this term will be explored within the section "The Homosocial Visualized." [Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985)].

the fine arts, particularly photography, and was instead relegated to mail-order publications dedicated to an appreciation of the male physique.[3] Although there were exceptions, museums had seen a steady decline of the classical academic male nude even before the beginning of the twentieth century.[4] A large reason for this decline was a fear of reprisal through an assumed association with homosexuality and by extension, weakness or worse, criminality. Such fears were heavily present among Siskind's artistic circles, most notably Abstract Expressionism, whose major figures both embraced and resisted Siskind and his work.[5]

Although notions of the masculine within art would soon be challenged, in 1960 the culture of homophobia and fear of its association was still present within the New York art world.[6] Queer theorists have looked, extensively, at the work of homosexual artists practicing around this time and after.[7] Likewise, art historians focused on the early Abstract Expressionist artists have explored the cultural justifications within macho-artistic production. The nude itself, and in particular heterosexual representations of the male nude, is not new within art history. Neither is the nude missing from consideration of queer aesthetics and representation within Post-War American art. Missing from current literature is an in-depth look into the intersection between the two. A growing number of historians and theorists have written about the struggles and triumphs of homosexual-

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[3] Alasdair Foster, *Behold the Man: The Male Nude in Photography* (Edinburgh, UK: Still Gallery), 13-20.
[4] Artists such as Thomas Eakins, Frederick Holland Day, and John Singer Sargent continued to use the male nude within accepted parameters of academic art; however, such works became less frequent as the new century progressed.
[5] Such discrepancies between acceptance and refusal will be covered later under "Situating Siskind within a Post-War American Landscape."
[6] By the late 1960s both female and queer artists would challenge the traditional notions of masculinity. Largely influenced by Second Wave Feminism and the Gay Liberation movement, the homophobia and misogyny of traditional art production would become the subject of the works, as well as new forms of gendered representations.
[7] Meaning scholars of Queer Theory and not necessarily theorists who are themselves queer identifying.

identified artists prior to and after the Second World War.[8] Others have written about the production and consumption of nude male imagery throughout history.[9] The presence of heterosexual-identified artists of the mid-twentieth century who produce nude-male imagery, however, has either been unknown or willingly ignored. This omission favors a narrative and explanation better suited to the existing mythology of the heterosexual-male artist. What little discussion exists has been relegated to passing comments, either benign, maligning, or excused as nothing more than accidental aberration.

The present study of Siskind considers an artist who straddles the lines between what is gay enough to fall under Queer Theory's purview and what is straight enough within Post-War American art. Discussion of Siskind's use of a nude male has been limited to form and composition or to gendered readings of representations of maleness. Such readings, though beneficial, fail to fully recognize the *tensions* within a work such as *Bill Lipkind 10*. This thesis blurs the lines of interpretation and reads the image as equally charged both formally and sensually. This reading reevaluates previously dominate consideration of the male body as argued by Kenneth Clark and Emmanuel Cooper, as being either de-gendered

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[8] Jonathan Katz and David C. Ward [see *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010)], Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer [see *Art & Queer Culture* (New York, NY: Phaidon, 2013) and Meyer's *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002)], Emmanuel Cooper [see *Male Bodies: A Photographic History of the Nude* (New York, NY: Prestel Publishing, 2004)], Jonathan Weinberg [see *Male Desire: The Homoerotic in American Art* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2005)], Allen Ellenzweig [see *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992)], and Thomas Waugh [see *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996)] have all sought to survey and dissect the history of homosexual and homoerotic nude-male representation.

[9] Tobias G. Natter and Elisabeth Leopold [see *Nude Men: From 1800 to the Present Day* (Munich, Germany: Hirmer Verlag, 2013)], Alasdair Foster [see *Behold the Man: The Male Nude in Photography* (Edinburgh, UK: Still Gallery, 1988)], Margaret Walters [see *The Nude Male: A New Perspective* (London, UK: Paddington Press, 1978)], Abigail Solomon-Godeau [see *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 1997)], Kenneth R. Dutton [see *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Physical Development* (New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995)], Edward Lucie-Smith [see *Adam: The Male Figure in Art* (London, UK: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998)], and John Ibson [see *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006)] all explore the history of the male nude in visual culture.

and de-eroticized when produced by a heterosexual male or otherwise eroticized if produced by a homosexual photographer.[10] This thesis explores Siskind's life and impetus for creating a work such as *Bill Lipkind 10*, reevaluates the position of this imagery within his work and pries the door open wider into an understanding of gender expression and representation within Post-War American art.

The following analysis looks more closely at *Bill Lipkind 10* in an effort to explore the tensions presented formally and interpretively. The first section, "The Homosocial Visualized," begins with a detailed visual analysis and considers the homosocial bond between Siskind and Lipkind in order to understand more fully the photograph's uniqueness within Siskind's oeuvre. The second section, "The (de)Gendering of *Bill Lipkind 10,*" considers the existing scholarship on the photograph, as well as other works by Siskind containing the human form. The tendency of scholars to read these photographs through Siskind's heterosexuality neglects the nuances of his work, while denying what Siskind himself saw as a more fluid tension within his work. This thesis proposes an alternative reading of the image based upon what is present within the frame, rather than simply going along with what has been written before. The final section, "Situating Siskind within a Post-War American Landscape," offers reasons for such gendered interpretations of Siskind's work. As a product and part of the Post-War American culture, playing the part of the macho-man became essential within the homophobic culture of the time. The homosexual panic in the period after the Second World War facilitated a culture of macho posturing within Abstract Expressionist and Modernist photography circles, manifesting in a visual negotiation of emasculation as evidenced within *Bill Lipkind 10*. A brief conclusion,

[10] See Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*. Princeton/Bollingen Deluxe Paperback Edition ed. Bollingen Series xxxv.2. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972) and Emmanuel Cooper: *Fully Exposed: The Male Nude in Photography* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995).

"Resolving the Tension," calls for further attention to gendered interpretations and for new research into overlooked representations of gender in works by other artists.

This thesis is not intended as a definitive guide to interpreting Aaron Siskind's work, nor as a rebuke of previous scholarship. When Siskind stated that he wished to "resolve [the] tensions without eliminating them," he opens up his work to a multiplicity of interpretation. By following a single understanding of an artist's work, we deny Siskind the complexity and resolution present within a single image. This thesis offers an alternative view to be added to the spectrum of possibilities and lessens the gendered segregation of visual interpretation.

THE HOMOSOCIAL VISUALIZED: AN ANALYTICAL READING OF *BILL LIPKIND 10*

> *Resembling massive tree trunks, his hairy legs look strong and robust, in command of the landscape stretching out before them.*
>
> —Diane Dillon[11]

In order to appreciate the particularity of *Bill Lipkind 10* within Aaron Siskind's oeuvre, it is important to consider both what has been written about the image and the unique relationship that allowed for the image to exist. Though the exact reasons are unknown, the tendency has been to ignore the nudity present or to read the photograph through a language reliant upon Siskind's heterosexuality. Such tendencies deny the complexity and tension within the image. Diane Dillon's statement, quoted above, is one of the very few instances where a critic or historian mentions *Bill Lipkind 10*. Similarly, Carl Chiarenza, the author of the standard biography on Siskind, notes in 1982 that the 1960 series "as a whole expresses strength, virility, calm control."[12] Neither Dillon nor Chiarenza

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[11] Diane Dillon, "Focusing on the Fragment: Asymmetries of Gender, Race, and Class in the Photography of Aaron Siskind." *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (1990): 64.

[12] Here though, Chiarenza does not specify whether he is referring to Siskind or Lipkind's expression of strength. [Carl Chiarenza, *Aaron Siskind: Pleasures and Terrors* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 156-157] *Aaron Siskind: Pleasures and Terrors* has been the sole major scholarship on Siskind to date. A mix of biography and critique, Chiarenza worked closely with Siskind on the completion of a previous doctoral dissertation (*"Terrors and Pleasures: The Life and Work of Aaron Siskind." PhD diss., Harvard University,* 1973) and the publication of *Aaron Siskind: Pleasures and Terrors* (1983). *Pleasures and Terrors* is still considered the authority on the life and work of Aaron Siskind to this day.

spend much time on this particular photograph or series. As a starting point, therefore, I will look more closely at the image.

Within the picture frame, *Bill Lipkind 10* offers three main areas of focus. The most prominent focus is on Lipkind's legs; the second is the shrub and land, which recede into the distance, but also rise to the knee joints; and the third and final focus is on the flat expanse of the sky. The legs are bare, as accentuated by the fine focus of hair and skin. They appear, as Dillon states, as tree trunks rising from the ground and towering out of the top of the image's frame. These are fragmented tree trunks, however, chopped off above the root and truncated at the tops. This fragmentation of Lipkind's body is intentional, allowing for the disintegration of the subject and flattening of the picture plane. As Lipkind's legs extend both above and below the frame, there is no sense of the body's placement within the landscape. We know that his feet must be touching the ground only because we understand basic concepts of gravity and our minds fill in the blanks. We also know that there is more to the body above the frame, as we understand the basics of human anatomy and how the legs continue to the buttocks and further. We know this not because Siskind has included it within the frame. Instead, Siskind limits the figural representation of bodily form and through a high contrast between foreground and background equates the legs to thick bands placed atop a two-tonal field. This flattening of the image by the transecting of the legs is akin to Franz Kline's *Study for "Black and White No. 2"* (1960). Siskind focuses his lens on the legs and not the receding landscape, allowing a reading of the legs as flesh and bark, but also allows for the haziness of the background to further flatten the image.

Siskind's focus and framing of the image evidences the close proximity from which the photo was taken. Working in a "straight" mode of photography, he composed the image

within the camera's viewfinder.[13] He did not use a telescopic lens nor further crop the image. The print presents the full negative taken that day. In order to attain such focus on, as well as framing of Lipkind's legs, Siskind had to be fairly close to Lipkind's body. Crouched on the ground, Siskind looked through the viewfinder and moved in until the registers fell just below the buttocks and just above the ankles at bottom. His conscious construction of the image is also evident in the bisection of the photograph at Lipkind's knee joints, which line up nearly perfectly with the horizon line. This is not a wholly spontaneous snapshot, but a result of conscious construction.

Certain clues, however, suggest that the photograph is slightly more spontaneous. Lipkind's right knee is slightly bent, implying motion in much the same way a contrapposto position suggest dynamism. The photograph becomes more dynamic when we consider the shape of the legs and the suggestion of what lies beyond the image frame. With the movement of Lipkind's knee, his right thigh begins to curve back towards the left leg. This formal quality is akin to another photograph by Siskind entitled *Providence 92* (1986) where Siskind photographed lines of tar on a highway. The bands of tar verge on touching, but never entirely do. The potential for two opposing forces to touch and the resulting tension within this duality is a prevailing theme in Siskind's work.[14]

A major tension present within *Bill Lipkind 10,* is the ambiguous nature of Siskind and Lipkind's relationship. Though individually heterosexual, their relationship lies somewhere between the purely platonic (heterosexual) and the purely sexual (homosexual). A retroactive "bromance" of sorts, the relationship falls within the spectrum

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[13] "Straight" photography is historically rooted in part in a desire to separate photography from other fine art forms. In order for photography to stand on its own, the art form had to abandon the modes of production typically associated with painting, such as print techniques that favored forms of manipulation in order to mimic the visual application of paint. [Henry Holmes Smith, "New Figures in a Classic Tradition" 1965, page 422 in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, edited by Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico, 1981)].

[14] James Rhem, *Aaron Siskind 55 Series* (New York, NY: Phaidon Press, 2003), 122-123.

of the homosocial. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *Between Men,* considers the creation of the term "homosocial" as necessary for those seeking to distance themselves from homosexuality:

> "Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy from "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual." In fact, it is applied to such activities as "male bonding," which may, as in [Western] society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. [15]

Sedgwick agrees that the homosocial exists as a social relationship between people of the same sex, viewing it not in opposition to homosexuality but rather as a continuum of it. She expands upon this point with her use of "desire" within the extended title of her text. She purposefully uses a word associated with the libido to suggest an inherent need, rather than a strictly sexual one. This need can take the form of homosexual love, but is not exclusive to such a relationship. Any form of kinship between like genders can be based upon homosocial desire, including that of two heterosexual men. Sedgwick believes this is possible because lust, for such an arrangement, lies outside of the male-male relationship and is directed at a member of the opposite sex in what she terms "erotic triangles."[16] The inclusion of an outside object of sexual desire allows for an intimate homosocial relationship without fear of internal sexual predation. This acknowledgement, within the relationship, allows for a bond greater than friendship, as the two males share a love for each other unclouded by carnality. These homosocial relationships take time, dedication, and a closeness absent from traditional friendships.

The friendship of Siskind and Lipkind, which spanned decades, falls within Sedgwick's definition of a homosocial relationship. Siskind's enacted gaze upon Lipkind's body in *Bill Lipkind 10* can therefore be viewed as a homosocial gaze, rather than a

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[15] Sedgwick, *Between Men* (1985), 122-123.
[16] Ibid., 21.

homoerotic or traditional (heterosexual) male gaze. Bred out of a fear of being labeled as homosexual within the cultural context of the time, Siskind and Lipkind's relationship relied on a mutual and reciprocal admiration of each other's virility. *Bill Lipkind 10* exhibits such signs of reciprocity by both the masculinizing and feminizing of Lipkind's body under the composition and direction of Siskind.

In 1960 when Siskind returned to Martha's Vineyard and captured Lipkind's naked form on film, he did so with a certain amount of comfort. An intimate, though platonic, relationship had already formed between the two men, allowing Siskind to negotiate personal issues through the manifestation of photographs showing Lipkind's naked form. The trip to the island had become a semi-annual event since his graduation from the City College of New York (CCYNY) in 1926. Every year Siskind would make the trip regardless of his current residence and spend the summer with the poets, painters, and intellectuals with whom he had cultivated relationships over time. The Vineyard proved to be an oasis for such men and women who spent the rest of their year teaching or working in their artist's lofts of the bigger cities. The same was true for Siskind, especially in the years after college when he had taken a job as an English teacher in the public schools of New York. For twenty-five years, Siskin taught young school children foot and measure in poetry. However, his career failed to satiate his intellectual prowess and so a few warm months out on the dunes of the island having a pint with his comrades helped alleviate his ennui from his day job.[17]

The most notable and pertinent of these friendships was his relationship with William "Bill" Lipkind. Siskind and Lipkind met during their time at college and became close while working for the *Lavender*, a monthly journal dedicated to poetry and literature run by students. The two young men dissected poetry while Siskind submitted poems to the

[17] Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 51-52.

publication. Praised within the greater school paper *The Campus,* Siskind's poetry and Lipkind's work as critic bound the two.[18] Siskind maintained friendships with others from the paper (including the editor of the *Lavender*, Leo Yamin, who owned a house on Martha's Vineyard) though Lipkind appears to have had the most lasting effect.

The often-cited anecdote of Siskind's first foray into photography started when he received a camera in 1930 as a present to celebrate his marriage to his first wife Sonia. Having had no formal training in photography and film development, his early photographs are akin to those of any honeymooner or amateur. Essentially snapshots, these images captured his friends and slices of life he found interesting. Siskind would then send the film off to be processed alongside Tim Tom's Thanksgiving dinner or little Susie Beetman's confirmation. Many of these early images are lost, as the ephemeral objects that they were. Siskind kept the remaining photographs within a slipshod box and single album. In a video interview from 1990, Siskind specifically mentions some of these early snapshots taken on Martha's Vineyard. He seems to come to life at the recollection of the context in which the photographs arose: "I was a school teacher. We had a couple months off. We went to the Vineyard every year and we had a wonderful beach there. We all went naked all the time."[19] Running around willy-nilly without a lick of clothing, the island in those early years allowed Siskind the opportunity to toy around with that first camera. This anything-goes attitude allowed Siskind to integrate two things that he seemed to enjoy immensely: photography and a lack of clothing. [20]

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[18] *The Campus* 38, no. 16 (March 29, 1926): 1.
[19] Judith Wechsler, dir. *Aaron Siskind: Making Pictures*. MOMA, Circulating Film Library (1991). Accessed December 13, 2013. http://judithwechsler.com/films/ aaron-siskind-making-pictures. 6:00-6:10".
[20] By this point in the 1930s, nudist colonies had begun popping up throughout the Western world, especially in Europe. Though slightly more frowned upon in America, nudism (or naturalism as its proponents were apt to call it) began to flourish. As its popularity grew, the trend hit Siskind and his friends; Siskind's camera was there to capture glimpses. [David McCarthy, "Social Nudism, Masculinity, and the Male Nude in the Work of William Theo Brown and Wynn Chamberlain in the 1960s." *Archives of American Art Journal* 38, no. 1/2 (1998): 29].

The 1960 photographs of Lipkind out on the Vineyard's beaches, in nothing more than his birthday suit, were not the first. While both men were vacationing on the island in 1935, Siskind photographed his friend lying on the sands of the beach. These photographs, which are not as fully realized as Siskind's later work, are different from *Bill Lipkind 10*. In the 1935 photograph, we see Lipkind from a distance and Siskind's relative location to Lipkind is unclear, caused in part by the ambiguous nature of the image's orientation. If we assume the orientation to be as it appears within the George Eastman House archives, with Lipkind's head pointing towards the top register of the frame, then Siskind's placement appears to be one of levitation or higher placement.[21] While the orientation is ambiguous, the distance separating the two men is noticeable and obscures Lipkind's identity, as well as his body. Though spread eagle in the photograph, Lipkind's genitalia is hidden by shadow and focus. Instead of this being a study of the body therefore, the photograph becomes more of a study of form against the sands.

Focus on form came to define Siskind's later work, but such early evidence of this foretells the later images. The subject matter of the photograph, the naked male figure, also foreshadows the 1960 photograph. Comfortable not only with the nudist mentality present on Martha's Vineyard at the time and with the subject itself, the preservation of such images and the repeated practice some two and half decades later speak to the relationship between Siskind and Lipkind.[22]

By 1935, the two men had spent over ten years cementing their friendship beyond the superficial aspects of shared interests through a mutual love of poetry and literature. If merely superficial in nature, Siskind would have had a variety of men to photograph in a similar fashion. The fact that Siskind chose to photograph Lipkind in the nude and that

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[21] Aaron Siskind, *Bill Lipkind (Martha's Vineyard)*. Photograph. 1935. 69:0062:0011. George Eastman House, Rochester, NY.

[22] It does not appear that Siskind photographed any other male in the nude and certainly not repeatedly.

Lipkind was amenable, on multiple occasions, places the relationship outside of Siskind's standard. There was something special about this relationship, something special enough for Siskind to mention Lipkind by name when asked during interview about his friendships from the time.[23]

The closeness of the two men should not be taken to imply nonplatonic feelings of either man. Both men were married, though Siskind's first marriage to Sonia née Glatter was rapidly deteriorating. Sonia suffered from psychological problems that led to her permanent hospitalization in 1937.[24] Carl Chiarenza, Siskind's biographer, notes how Aaron and Sonia only consummated their marriage once, which led to a pregnancy and traumatic miscarriage. By Chiarenza's account, the miscarriage and psychological instability of his wife led to Siskind's own issues regarding sex and questioning of his own virility in relation to women.[25]

There is no reason to view Siskind or Lipkind's sexual orientation as being anything other than heterosexual. It is possible, however, that Siskind's lack of erotic intimacy was assuaged by the platonic intimacy he shared with Lipkind, thereby completing Eve Sedgwick's "erotic triangle." Chiarenza cites the poem "Song" as evidence of Siskind's intimate ambiguity. "Pale man and paler maid;/O which do I prefer? –/Those seated on the bank/Or the dream of him and her" speaks not to Siskind's desire to supplant one form of intimacy over another.[26] Instead, Siskind found some happy medium, through the recognition of tension between the polarities of sexual and platonic intimacy. The homosocial bond between these two men allows for a representational manifestation of

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[23] "Oral History Interview with Aaron Siskind, 1982 September 28-October 2." By Barbara Shikler. Archives of American Art. Accessed September 20, 2014.
[24] Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 30.
[25] Ibid., 11.
[26] The original drafts of the poem "Song" can be found in the Center For Creative Photography's archive: "AG30:28/1-8 – Early poetry and writing for *The Lavender".* Carl Chiarenza also quotes this poem in both "Form and Content in the Early Work of Aaron Siskind," *The Massachusetts Review* 19, no. 4. (1978): 812 and *Aaron Siskind: Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 11.

Siskind's psychological dualism. He was allowed to abstractly capture a sensual form, while the nonsexual relationship with his subject allowed for a distancing from eroticism. Siskind's abstraction in search of rectifying inner turmoil aligned him with other Abstract Expressionist artists who explored the human psyche through form and gesture.[27] The use of the male form in such explorations situates *Bill Lipkind 10* within a tense and ambiguous spot.

[27] A focus on "form and gesture" within Abstract Expressionism does not mean to suggest that there was a lack of content within these artists works. Nor does it mean to suggest that artists working outside of the parameters of Abstract Expressionism did not have a concern with form or express content through use of techniques such as gesture. The distinction can be drawn that Abstract Expressionist artists focused on formal composition and gesture over a readily identifiable subject matter within their works. This commonality between Abstract Expressionist artists was championed by both Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, the preeminent critics and cheerleaders of the Abstract Expressionist movement. Greenberg thought that the formal qualities of such artists' work were paramount and the lack of discernable subject and content within the work spoke to a new form of painting, which was about painting itself [see Clement Greenberg, "Toward a Newer Laocoon." 1940. In *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 562-68. Revised ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003)]. Harold Rosenberg felt that gesture was paramount within the work and that such "action" allowed for the artists to access their psyches, unimpeded by a fidelity to discernable subject. Rosenberg acknowledged the presence of a content within the work; however, this content should not be readable to the average viewer, and instead thought that the works stood in as a formal documentation of gesture and a manifestation of the artists' psyches [see Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters." 1959. In *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 589-92. Revised ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003)].

THE (DE)GENDERING OF *BILL LIPKIND 10*

In the first major monograph on Aaron Siskind in thirty-two years, *Aaron Siskind: Another Photographic Reality*, the author, Giles Mora, reaffirms Siskind's heterosexuality by labeling him as "[c]ultivated, warmhearted, fun-loving, sensual, *a ladies' man*...."[28] The author's need to reaffirm Siskind's heterosexuality—particularly by contrasting the "feminized" attributes listed just before calling him "a ladies' man"—is evidence of a tendency to read Siskind's work through a heterosexualized narrative and language. Because of this propensity, the biography and history of Siskind and his work would suggest a traditional (heterosexual) application of theory concerning the gaze; however, the gaze is not fixed. It can morph depending on its application and evolve through a better understanding and extension of its underlying principles. It can be influenced by implied carnality or it can be absent of that sexualization and relate more to a nonsexual power dynamic at play. The gaze is not determined by the gender or sexuality of any of its players.

With the gaze in mind, it proves fruitful to consider the totality of Siskind's oeuvre in respect to representations of the nude, both female and male. Although current literature on gender diversity within Siskind's work is still limited, the literature does illustrate the disparity among theoretical applications of the gaze, dependent on the gender present. While it is important to reiterate that Lipkind is the only known male whom Siskind photographed in the nude, we do know that Siskind photographed multiple women

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[28] Emphasis added. Giles Mora, *Aaron Siskind: Another Photographic Reality* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014), 22-23.

throughout his life and not all of them were his wives.[29] Unlike his images of Lipkind, which are identified through a full name (William or Bill Lipkind), the women he chose to photograph were identified by their first names only. Often times they went untitled.[30] One such case in which we do know the sitter's full name is that of *Untitled (Diane Hoffman)* from 1961, taken only a year after *Bill Lipkind 10*.

Siskind's photograph of Hoffman presents the viewer with a very different take on the nude compared to the 1960 photographs depicting Lipkind. For *Untitled (Diane Hoffman)*, Siskind still used the large format camera and likely spent an equal amount of time on the composition, but the presentation is very different. Where Lipkind stands towering over the landscape beyond, Hoffman lays atop a blanket while her body is positioned with a painting on the wall behind her head, her soft and supple body highlighted. Lipkind's pillar-like legs however, with coarse hairs and lines, complement the scrub beyond them. Furthermore, Hoffman's body is displayed as a cohesive unit with her body visible from feet to head, whereas Lipkind's body is fragmented throughout the series. The angle at which Siskind photographed the female Hoffman is also notably different from that of the male Lipkind. She is photographed level with the camera, which allowed Siskind to highlight the buttocks, a breast, and the face within the frame. The difference between the recumbent nude and the standing nude allows Hoffman's body to become sexually charged through her positioning and fulfills the standards of the "male gaze."

By photographing Hoffman against a painting, Siskind visually equates the female body with the art object, a thing to be possessed and fetishized. Enacting the male gaze on the female body fulfills Jacques Lacan's notion of the reciprocal gaze.[31] By showing

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[29] Siskind was married three times throughout his life and married to his third wife in 1960 at the time of the Bill Lipkind series of photographs.
[30] Dillon, "Focusing on the Fragment," (1990): 64.
[31] Lacan sees the gaze as existing when there is a reciprocation of viewing between the subject and object. This reciprocation exist as a screen placed in the middle of two triangles (the subject or

Hoffman's face, Siskind is able to look and be looked at. This reciprocation allows Siskind to reclaim the missing part of himself by filling a void left by anxiety and metaphorical castration.[32] In opposition to this dynamic, Siskind's photograph of Lipkind negotiates such castration differently. Whereas Hoffman provides a metaphorical space to insert the phallic power, Siskind must first formally castrate Lipkind's body by framing the photograph just below the genitals. It is through this purposeful truncation of form that the phallic void is made possible.

Norman Bryson wrote of such figural castration through the minimization and the covering of the genitals. In "Géricault and 'Masculinity'", Bryson sees this selective representation as a negotiation of the strength and virility in the depiction of men. Analyzing a photograph of Arnold Schwarzenegger taken at the height of his body-building career, Bryson suggests that the thong covering Schwarzenegger's genitals serves as a shield not only for the sensitive eyes of female viewers but also as a shield for men. By covering the emblem of virility (the penis), the male viewer's masculinity is not challenged.[33] Bryson also analyzes a Greek statue from the fifth century B.C.E., which he posits was endowed with a relatively small penis due to the artist's desire to minimize the figure's masculinity so as not to threaten his own maleness, rather than out of mimetic representation.[34] As with the photograph of Schwarzenegger, the artist's choice protects him from his own fears, thereby fulfilling the conscious or unconscious mission of filling a

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viewer looks upon a object with a triangle extending from the eye and encompassing the object, while the object in turn looks back at the viewer with the same triangular field, thereby encompassing the viewer. Where the two triangles meet is the screen of the gaze). [Jacques Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 105-106].

[32] The act of looking and the enactment of the gaze are, for Lacan, a way for man to attain or retain something absent in him. It is through the act of the gaze that he seeks to assuage a fear of castration (or loss of the phallus as power). [Lacan, *Book XI* (1998), 181-184].

[33] Norman Bryson. "Géricault and 'Masculinity.'" In *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, edited by Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, 228-59 (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 235-236.

[34] Bryson, "Géricault and 'Masculinity'" (1994), 233-235.

void created by castration anxiety. *Bill Lipkind 10* also fulfills this desire through cropping. Without the presence of the genitalia to threaten Siskind's own masculinity, the photographer can focus on the power of the legs dominating the landscape beyond. The compositional castration of Lipkind, within the image frame, emasculates him to a certain extent. Within Post-War American culture, the intimacy of the two men helps to assuage the fear of castration while fulfilling the libidinal and scopophilic drive in each man. [35]

Another to explore the psychological reasons for figural castration was Kenneth Clark, though he found photography unable to properly express the idealized notions of masculinity and maleness. It is not from a lack of talent on the photographer's part, but rather is because a photograph contains a referent (the model), it is the referent's (model's) ability to live up to the standard of idealized masculinity that is at play.[36] A photographer, according to Clark, is only able to capture what is already an attempt at perfection. Because humans can never truly realize idealization, the photograph is unable to fully convey this ideal. German photography during the Second World War and prior relied heavily on the notion that the human form was an expression of inner morality and purity.[37] The representations of the male form were therefore idealized to a point of absurdity, and though photography was often used in this regard, the preferred media were painting and sculpture. Through the idealization of the male form, issues of eroticism were supposed to be invalidated. The men on view were intended to inspire the population to strive for a similar ideal physically, morally, and spiritually. Within this idealization of the male form, one facet of male anatomy (the penis) proved problematic. Not only did the penis present a

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[35] Sigmund Freud, for whatever faults he may have had, believed that the act of looking was derived in part from a libidinal inclination (the *scopophilic drive*). Man's inherent desire to touch was extended to the eye and viewing, with pleasure deriving from this act. [Sigmund Freud. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Translated by James Strachey (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2011), 19-26].
[36] Clark, *The Nude* (1972), 6-7.
[37] Walters, *The Nude Male* (1978), 258-260.

symbol of male sexuality and therefore connotations of the homosexual, it also was challenging to the viewers' own sense of virility and "measuring up."[38] While *Bill Lipkind 10* denotes strength through the pillar-like legs and their placement above the earth, the sign of phallus as power (the phallus itself) is removed and the subject of the work becomes, in a way, degendered and desexualized. By not degendering or desexualizing the image, the viewer assigns a sexual orientation to the artist. Such an assignment appears to have been problematic to previous scholars of *Bill Lipkind 10*. Writers have shied away from acknowledging the nudity or otherwise interpreted the image through heterosexualized language.

An example of such gendered and sexualized readings is explored by Michael Hatt in the work of Thomas Eakins. In "The Male Body in Another Frame: Thomas Eakins' *The Swimming Hole* as Homoerotic Image," Hatt examines the divergent readings of Eakins' images of nude males: the homosexual-erotic versus the homoerotic. He parses the distinction with the said and unsaid desire implicit in each. Hatt finds there is often a conflagration between the two when reading an image of the male nude. For instance, when writers comment on Eakins' *The Swimming Hole,* they do so in one of two ways. They either vocally dispute claims that Eakins is gay and read the image as a realistic representation of life for the artist and his students, or alternatively read the image through an acceptance of Eakins's homosexuality and conflate that sexuality with homoerotic designation. In the first case, the images are removed from homoeroticism because Eakins is not homosexual. In the latter case, the writers have so imbedded the sexual orientation of the artist into their reading of the painting that they use the term homoerotic rather than the more appropriate homosexual-erotic.[39]

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[38] Bryson, "Géricault and 'Masculinity'" (1994), 233-235.
[39] Michael Hatt, "The Male Body in Another Frame: Thomas Eakins' 'The Swimming Hole' as a Homoerotic Image." In *Many Pursuits: Writings on the Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins*, edited by

Hatt also explores the often-cited fact that Eakins worked from a photograph taken of his students reveling naked at a swimming hole to either refute or support a homosexual-erotic inclusion within the painting. Though the positioning of the figures is similar between photograph and painting, the boys' bodies are turned slightly within the painted work, thereby obscuring or removing the genitals from the scene. For those dismissers of Eakins' possible deviance from the heteronormative, they point to the photographs as mere studies. The changes Eakins made to the representation of the photographic reality are in line with the historic idealization of the male form as signifier not of lust but of purity and moral decency. Others, and Hatt is in this camp, see the alteration as a sign that Eakins was conscious of the societal mores of the day and averted direct recognition of the penis as an object of sexual urges so the painting would be more widely accepted.[40]

A similar understanding of *Bill Lipkind 10* may be considered. Because Siskind was an avowed heterosexual, aside from his interest in duality including that of sexuality, the image of Lipkind's nudity warrants no consideration of the erotic within. This is why the photograph has been discussed in terms of form and masculine power, rather than objectification and sexualization. Alternatively, when discussing a photograph of female nudity by Siskind, scholars do so through the objectification of the feminine rather than a purely formal expression of duality. Such readings ignore the relationship between photographer and subject as well as the physical proximity of Siskind to Lipkind's naked flesh. Like Eakins, Siskind has hidden the sign of sexual denotation and left the viewer unchallenged by fears of homosexual connotation.

Ilene Susan Fort, 262-81 (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011). Previously published in *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts* (1993): 262-266.
[40] Ibid., 266-270.

Here we can see a correlation to Siskind's *Bill Lipkind 10* and the other photographs from the 1960 series. Siskind does not present the viewer with Lipkind's genitals and therefore, the implication is that he is fearful of it. He saw his friend's penis, but consciously chose to exclude it from representation within a public form. Though the photographs taken in 1935 include Lipkind's genitalia, those photographs were taken as holiday snapshots rather than meant for public display. Indeed, in an image of Siskind's from the 1960 series (*Bill Lipkind* 13), which depicts Lipkind recumbent along the boardwalk, he or Siskind chose to hide the penis from view physically rather than compositionally.[41] It is possibly a result of the two men joking around and representing Lipkind as Siskind would often represent females around this time; the photograph stands unique amongst the series. Though Lipkind is still partially truncated, his head and lower legs are outside the picture frame, *Bill Lipkind 10* has a physical distancing that the others do not. Though the genitals (and by extension the gender and explicit homoerotic nature of the image) are removed, the composition suggests an objectification of the male body, rather than an abstraction of the body. No longer is the body a form collaged against a field of monochromatic tonality; it is a representation of the female form through performance.

In *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation*, Abigail Solomon-Godeau focuses her attention on these "feminized" male forms, rather than hyper-masculine archetypes.[42] Solomon-Godeau unpacks multiple artworks of various artists from different periods, which she sees as symptomatic of greater social dynamics and as a negotiation of political and social fears. Framing her discourse within homosocial relationships, Solomon-Godeau desexualizes these often-eroticized images of men. She suggests that the homosocial as

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[41] The titling of this image as *Bill Lipkind 13* is my own. As its only known existence lies within the negative and contact print, Siskind did not officially title the image. Other images from the series, which were printed (such as *Bill Lipkind 10*), are numbered according to their sequence within the contact sheet. As such, my titling of *Bill Lipkind 13* is a result of the image occurring in the thirteenth position on this contact sheet.

[42] Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble* (1997).

opposed to the homosexual (or even Freudian bisexual for that matter) nature of the image-making is responsible for the types of images produced.[43] The "feminization" as Solomon-Godeau sees it is not a means to eroticize the male body for sexual gratification, but a way to negotiate male-male relationships and the power struggle within.[44] While the gratification is not sexualized, it is still present and instead relies on a form of fraternal love. Whether this takes the form of a classical Greek sculpture or a Neo-Classical painting, the image-maker's goal is to idealize the male figure in order to show oneness with him. It is through this shared admiration that the homosocial gaze takes root. The viewer seeks to find something within the object of the gaze that complements and completes them. Through his active gaze, and therefore in a place of power, the viewer fills the castrated void, not through the phallus found in the passive female, but instead in the passive male. Because as Kaja Silverman points out the gaze lies outside of desire and the carnal, such a gaze does not challenge the male's sexuality, but rather reaffirms the appreciation of himself as heterosexual.[45] Siskind's photograph of Lipkind, nude and passive, therefore stands not as testament to the photographer's desire to have sex with Lipkind, but rather as a way to express Siskind's admiration for a friend. This admiration borders on the homoerotic, however, because it is produced through the gaze that Siskind arguably sought to find a part of himself and to reaffirm his own virility and power as a heterosexual man.

It is important to ask why Siskind's *Bill Lipkind 10* has fallen through the cracks of consideration if literature on the gaze in regards to the male nude exist. One possible reason is that Lipkind's age is at odds with the prevailing representation of the male nude. Through the Academic model of the nude, we see either a classicizing of the male, an eroticizing of

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[43] Simply put, Freud considers bisexuality as not about a physical hermaphroditism, nor a transexualising of the subject, but rather the combination of masculine and feminine traits, which the bisexual recognizes and finds attractive in another person of the same sex [Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (2011), 19-26].
[44] Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 50.
[45] Ibid., 130.

the male, or a clinical observation of the male, with the exception of male nude self-portraits. This historical consideration of the male nude therefore colors any deeper attempt to understand the representation of the male nude outside of such confines. *Bill Lipkind 10,* and indeed the entirety of the 1960 series on Lipkind, does not fit these criteria. Lipkind's apparent age in the photographs subverts any notion of idealization of the male nude. Therefore, arguments for traditional classification of the body are absent. Writers still use the traditional terminology to describe *Bill Lipkind 10*, but a discussion of nonconforming representation does not presently exists.

Others before have chosen therefore, when they do at all, to look at Siskind's male nude as a representation of form and dismiss the body itself. Such a dismissal is at odds with Siskind's own modus operandi of insisting that his selection of a referent is intentional in order to gain access to some universal truth. Therefore, logic tells us that he consciously chose to use a nude male as referent. Lipkind could easily have been clothed and the formal qualities would still permeate the picture plane; however, he is nude. Similarly, we know that Siskind depicted inanimate objects and surfaces to express the same notions, which we see in the Lipkind photographs. This omission by scholars of the subject matter is puzzling.

At the heart of this discussion is the gendering of chosen terminology. Repeatedly I employ the terms phallus, masculine, heroic, struggle, et cetera with intention. The gendering of photographic and artistic means is not new, though it is often done without consideration of the meaning behind those terms. When such terms are used, it is implied that the opposing readings of both image and intent would be emasculating. Even the few comments and writings made about Siskind's male nudes reinforce his hetero-ness. By using these words, the writers, whether consciously or unconsciously, make sure the reader knows that Siskind was a straight male. In writing about the photographs of George Platt

Lynes or Minor White, a different approach is taken.[46] These writings focus on either the subject's effeminacy or sensuality (itself a marker of the feminine). Instead of describing the subject of a Lynes or White image through hetero-gendered language, the writer often reverts to the same language one would use when describing the representation of a female form by a heterosexual photographer. Indeed when Diane Dillon discusses the female subject in *Louise 30* (1974), she does so through feminist language based in a heterosexualized male gaze. At the same time, she reads the image of Lipkind through a heterosexual language still: "his hairy legs look strong and robust, in command of the landscape stretching out before them."[47] She selects some aspects of each image to strengthen her point and in doing so reinforces the eroticized gaze of one and denies a similar gaze to the other. Dillon even goes so far as to use certain aspects of *Louise 30* to suggest parallel gender representations in Siskind's earlier work on *The Harlem Document*, while ignoring those same aspects in relation to the image of Lipkind.[48] Whereas the truncation of Louise's body is symbolic of the female as object for Dillon, the fragmentation of Lipkind's form is not. If fragmentation of one gender can be read in one way, why cannot the other be read in a similar vein?

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[46] An example of such gendered language is found in Allen Ellenzweig's *The Homoerotic Photograph* (1992). When writing about the male form within George Platt Lynes' work [*Untitled (Tattooed man on bed),* not dated), Ellenzweig employs language such as "a well-developed and nude young man is seductively reclining, his eyes closed as if to suggest a state of dream-sleep" (92). Another example is found when speaking of a photograph by Minor White, *William LaRue, Carmel Highlands, Ca.* (1959): "His solemn gaze into the camera has some of the tenderness of imploring seduction. The pose appears as uncertain offering of his slender frame; by raising his arms, thereby opening up his torso he displays himself like a gift to be unwrapped. The play of line and tone in the picture especially enhances the delicacy of sentiment." [Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph* (1992), 114-115].
[47] Dillon, "Focusing the Fragment" (1990): 64.
[48] Ibid., 64-65.

SITUATING SISKIND WITHIN A POST-WAR AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

The gendered reading of *Bill Lipkind 10* relies on Siskind's allegiance with the Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s and 1960s. This is not without reason as Siskind aligned his work with the Abstract Expressionists and was tentatively embraced by this mostly exclusive boy's club of post-war New York.[49] This predominate reading of Siskind's work as Abstract Expressionist (concerned with above all else form and gesture) fails to recognize other possible readings of Siskind's photographs. Previous discussion of Siskind's figural works favor form and composition, ignoring the representation of a living, breathing person who existed in front of the camera and therefore had a physical relation to the photographer. Though the exact reason for such omissions can never be known, a possible explanation may lie in the continued effort of historians to adhere to the trope of Abstract Expressionist as paradigm of masculine genius. Such fidelity to the established myth of the artist is reliant upon not only a shared understanding of the works in question, but also evidential of the culture of homophobia within post-war American art and beyond. Furthermore, to suggest alternative readings of Siskind's work would destabilize the already precarious placement of Siskind within art-historical consideration. This

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[49] The "boys' club" manifest itself both literally and metaphorically through "The Eighth Street Club" as well as through meet-ups at the Cedar Tavern. Both locations, though not finitely exclusive of women and homosexuals, were predominately homosocial environments that served to further masculinize the movement as well as the perception of the movement. [see Valerie Hellstein's dissertation *Grounding the Social Aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism: A New Intellectual History of The Club* (dissertation, Stony Brook University, May 2010)]. There were exceptions to this exclusivity, though the majority of artists aligned with the movement were heterosexual, white, male painters. [see Anne Gibson's *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999)].

destabilization was present within the photographer's lifetime, as the Abstract Expressionist and Modernist photography circles failed to fully embrace Siskind. The Abstract Expressionists saw photography as too reliant upon a referent while some within Modernist photography circles considered Siskind to be a turncoat of photography as its own art form. Such tensions are present within Siskind's work and indeed within *Bill Lipkind 10.*

Before his foray into photography, Siskind taught English and literature to public school students in New York. His close connection and history with poetry made it a sustaining and financially secure occupation, but Siskind never felt satiated by this calling. He joined the New York Photo League (NYPL) while teaching in the public schools and found some solace in hitting the pavement, photographing Harlem of the 1940s. Like other photographers working for the NYPL, the task at hand was to document the daily life of the borough in order to convey that life to a broader public while also cementing photography's place within the greater art world. Unlike painting, which is a subjective act, affected by the artist's interpretation and selection, the camera's mechanical nature allows for the most faithful documentation of presence before the eye.[50]

Some photographers at the time, particularly Siskind, encountered resistance from the Abstract Expressionists and were not readily accepted by the group, due to the documentary nature of photography. The leading critics and theorists of the day, namely Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, proclaimed that photography was incapable of reaching the level of Abstract Expressionism precisely because it was reliant on a physical referent. To these men, photography's present and future existed to embrace the referent and to compose works that expressed and aestheticized the mechanical nature of the medium. The lofty and profound nature of Abstract Expressionism should be left to the

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[50] Krauss, Rosalind. "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism." *October* 19 (Winter 1981): 26.

painters. Painters, through the subjective nature of their medium, could access their subconscious, resulting in a fidelity to the paint and the canvas.[51] Unimpeded by negotiation of subject matter, artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline were able to make the painting about painting itself. Rather than having to rely on outside referents, which interfere with the singular nature of the flat picture plane, true Abstract Expressionist artists connected gesture and form to their inner selves. Such abstract concepts were thought to be impossible to visualize with traditional subject matter and representation.

Even with the deck stacked against him, Siskind became attached early on to the leading Abstract Expressionist painters of the day. Siskind's relationship to Abstract Expressionism began well before there even was "Abstract Expressionism". While attending CCNY, Siskind met and became friends with some who would later become the founders of the movement. Barnett Newman was among his classmates and close friends in these years. They shared drinks and dissected poetry together; they philosophized about the nature of man and his role within the world. When, in 1948, Newman waxes on the importance of American art not to make cathedrals of man, but rather cathedrals of themselves and their psyches, much of this consideration had already begun to foment while at CCNY, over these long discussions with others such as Siskind.[52] Siskind was instrumental in arranging Cy Twombly's (whom Siskind also knew from his college) first solo show in Chicago in 1951. That same year, Siskind was the only photographer to have his work exhibited alongside Abstract Expressionist painters and sculptors at the infamous *9th Street* exhibition.[53] This exhibition established many of the Abstract Expressionists as the preeminent artists of the

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[51] Clement Greenberg, "Four Photographers" *New York Review of Books*, Jan 23, 1964 found in *Modernism with a Vengeance: 1957-1969.* Edited by John O'Brian. Vol. 4 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 183-187.
[52] Barnet Newman in "Six Opinions on What Is Sublime in Art" (1948). *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-run Periodicals* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1990), 166.
[53] Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 90.

day. Siskind's inclusion suggests a shared aesthetic with the Abstract Expressionists, which has mostly been erased from history in what Chiarenza saw as a "telling example of the traditional, prejudicial avoidance of photography by historians of picture-making."[54] Greenberg and Rosenberg, who were influenced by the 1951 exhibition, continued this denial of Siskind's place within the New York School.

From time to time, Greenberg and Rosenberg praised Siskind and his ability to mimic the formal qualities of the Abstract Expressionist painters, but they always did so in a dismissive way. Rosenberg praised what he saw as Siskind's ability to skip the step required in the dissemination of Abstract Expressionist art to the greater public: "Instead of scenes that seem like paintings, Siskind's pictures *are* paintings as they appear on the printed page — which is where people today see most of the paintings that they see. They are reproductions, though reproductions that have no original."[55] For Rosenberg, Siskind, unlike other photographers, was not looking to create a unique or original image, but rather he skipped the step of the original and instead ended up with a copy of nothing. In the age of art magazines and printed reproductions, one was no longer required to go to a museum or gallery to view the contemporary masters. The paintings of the real artists of the day would be photographed, further flattening the image so they could then be seen and enjoyed by the masses. Siskind's "attempt" to duplicate Cy Twombly's automatic-writing painting with seaweed rather than paint and canvas, was interesting in that it instantly became the magazine reproduction of Twombly's work, rather than equating it through the action and gesture required to produce the unique painting in the first place.

How had Siskind, with his chemistry, mechanics, and indexical nature, gained admittance into the Abstract Expressionist circle? The answer to this question is

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[54] Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 90.
[55] Harold Rosenberg, "Aaron Siskind: the Camera and Action Art." *Art News* 58, no. 6. (September 1959): 22.

complicated and lies in two main factors. The first is Siskind's approach to composition. By restricting the space of the picture frame and cropping figures to remove their context, Siskind flattened his images.[56] This flattening of the picture plane was very important to Abstract Expressionist artists. By flattening the work, the third dimension was eradicated, thereby removing the connection to the physical world. In some of Siskind's more well-known works, he has achieved this effect by bringing the camera very close to the physical subject and removing any spatial cues traditional to photography.[57]

Secondly, Siskind connected with the subject of his photography beyond the superficial nature of its physicality. That is, like the Abstract Expressionists who sought to connect with their inner psyches, Siskind believed that the action of photographing, the experience of it, went beyond mere indexical representation. As he explained in 1965:

> The experience itself may be described as one of total absorption in the object. But the object serves only a personal need and the requirements of the picture. […]The object has entered the picture in a sense; it has been photographed directly. But it is often unrecognizable; for it has been removed from its usual context, disassociated from its customary neighbors and forced into new relationships. […]I must stress that my own interest is immediate and in the picture. What I am conscious of and what I feel is the picture I am making, the relation of that picture to others I have made and, more generally, its relation to others I have experienced.[58]

Siskind felt that when he photographed a subject, he was reaching out, capturing it, and placing it within the photographic paper. The essence of what he photographed was transposed into something new, and the product was something indicative of himself, rather than of the subject.[59]

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[56] See *Martha's Vineyard (Seaweed) 1* [Photograph. 1943. 76.63.18. Aaron Siskind Archive. Center for Creative Photography] in which Siskind photographed and abstracted seaweed using this process of composition.
[57] Christine Mehring, "Siskind's Challenge: Action Painting and a Newer Laocoon, Photographically Speaking." *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, Photography at Yale ser. (2006): 95.
[58] Aaron Siskind, "Statement." In *Aaron Siskind: Photographer*, edited by Nathan Lyons, 24 (Rochester, NY: George Eastman House, 1965), 24.
[59] Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 88.

With Siskind's strained allegiance to Abstract Expressionism, one must ask what else, outside of composition and form, was shared between the man and the group.[60] Both came to prominence after the Second World War when culture had shifted within the United States and a fear of emasculation ran rampant in the New York art world. Anecdotal stories of the artists' extramarital dalliances and substance abuse are legendary. Beyond the application of techniques such as automatic writing within their works, historians have suggested the ways in which the artists of the time sought to assert their masculinity through, for example, the violence of Franz Kline's brush stroke, or the phallic nature of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings.[61]

Michael Leja has argued that the macho-posturing of Abstract Expressionist artists was due in large part to the cultural saturation of the Modern Man discourse. [62] This desire to present oneself as strong and masculine played into the production of works. Gesture, so applauded by both Greenberg and Rosenberg, was a masculine act.[63] The male form was therefore unnecessary in the work because the physicality of its gesture was its own masculine manifestation.[64] Any detour from such a united front of masculinity would therefore be seen as counter to the Modern Man and in a way unpatriotic.

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[60] Admittedly, even Greenberg would come to admire Siskind's work for its formal qualities, but he would never truly accept it as part of the New York art that he so admired [see Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 101]. Similarly, even though Harold Rosenberg would consent to writing a forward for one of Siskind's publications, he did so with an apparent reservation and possible obligation to his friend [see Mehring, "Siskind's Challenge" (2006): 97].

[61] Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 277.

[62] Michael Leja, in *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, devotes a sizable portion to this. Built around philosophies of war and economics, the "Modern Man" sought to free himself from the shackles of a society that invented the atomic bomb [Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism* (1993), 243]. For Leja and those that he references, the growth of Abstract Expressionism comes from, in part, the reevaluation of mans place within society (Ibid., 234). Through this liberation, man must distance himself from the problematic connotations of international *Other*, the Soviet Communist and the European decadents, and construct a national American identity based upon notions of morality and fortitude [Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism* (1993), 277].

[63] The feminine was present, rather as a foil to man's moral integrity.

[64] Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism* (1993), 277.

Incidentally, in 1948 and in the middle of the debate over the nature of man, Alfred Kinsey released his study on human sexuality, or more specifically male sexuality.[65] This study was highly controversial, but became a common topic of conversation for both learned and lay alike. Kinsey's report of the high statistical prevalence of men who had experimented, in one way or another, with a person of the same sex opened the floodgates to the possibility that anyone was a homosexual. This ensuing homosexual panic situated itself within many aspects of American life and culture, though most notably in urban centers of creativity, such as New York. Senator Joseph McCarthy's "Lavender Scare" postulated that the homosexual was a danger to national security as our Cold War enemies might use his private life to blackmail and attain classified material. Through this fear and persecution, a discourse connecting homosexuality and un-Americanism saturated disparate corners of society and cultural production. It was enough to be accused of homosexuality to end a career.[66]

This fear and panic was deeply situated within the art world and to a greater extent within the Abstract Expressionist community. Thomas Hart Benton, Jackson Pollock's Regionalist mentor, was adamant about the role of the homosexual and effete poisoning American art through the "homo-intern". The homo-intern is the idea that the art world was run and funded by homosexuals who wished to subvert all that was good and American in art. By aligning the new artists with European effetism, Benton and others situated the male artist as guilty of homosexuality by dint of profession itself.[67] Benton did not have to

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[65] In this, though flawed, scientific study of sexuality, Kinsey puts forth, through data, the idea of a continuum of male desire. Rather than the notion that you were either homosexual or heterosexual, or the rare instance of bisexual, Kinsey reported that sexuality lies within a spectrum of possibilities. [Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male.* Reprint ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998)].

[66] The fear was so prevalent that thousands of accused homosexual men were dismissed from government employment. [David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-14].

[67] Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism* (1993), 255.

provide any evidence for this, as the general fear within society was strong enough to subscribe without it. There was, however, recourse to such condemnations.

The most successful way to refute claims of homosexual desire was to play up the machismo and misogyny of heteronormative behavior. Pollock was king of this domain as he and those who wished to benefit from his success relied heavily upon the renegade persona. Even in Hans Namuth's infamous photographs of Pollock, Pollock is shown as domineering and rugged.[68] The way that Pollock talked about his art was always done in a masculinizing way and about toughness and vigor, rather than about harmony and decorum.[69] These aspects situated Pollock alongside the Hollywood heartthrobs of the day, but also reassured the public that the new American art form was not an effete European copy. Rather this art was born out of the ruggedness of true Americans. As Patricia Vettel-Becker points out in *Shooting from the Hip,* Siskind aligned himself with the Abstract Expressionist movement through the identification and formal posturing of the heroic male.[70]

Throughout her writing, Vettel-Becker considers how society changed after the Second World War and ensuing Cold War, and the effect this change had on male photographers and their images of men in America. Vettel-Becker breaks these photographers' depictions of masculinity into archetypes of masculinity, such as "the cowboy" and "the adventurer." These archetypes, she argues, were necessary to a country fractured by war and the necessity of men to reassert their claim to the historically patriarchal society. The process of this reassertion came through the photographic production of "heroes" and "tough guys."

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[68] Katz, *Hide/Seek* (2010), 49.
[69] Anna C Chave, "Pollock and Krasner: Script and Postscript." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 24 (Autumn 1993): 98-99.
[70] Patricia Vettel-Becker, *Shooting from the Hip: Photography, Masculinity, and Postwar America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 23.

By positioning the male in front of the camera as masculine, the photographer, according to Vettel-Becker, arms himself against threats to his own masculinity.[71] Siskind was not a veteran of any war, though we do know that his lack of service was in large part due to his fear of war itself.[72] One can combine this fear with Vettel-Becker's description of the social climate of America during 1960 and the visual compensation for such shared anxiety through the portrayal of the male figure within photography. In order to assuage his own anxiety of not being masculine or strong enough to serve, Siskind presents the viewer with an image of Lipkind as powerful and thereby carries that strength to himself. Like Pollock, with his violence and aggression expressed through paint on the canvas, Siskind used his photography to express and assuage the inner turmoil of his psyche.

While the Abstract-Expressionist machine was well oiled and permeated with a macho attitude, there were those who strayed from the path. Artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and Jasper Johns recognized their "divergence" from the heteronormative course. Their private sexual preference, sometimes fluid, was known to those around them, both socially and professionally. Out of fear of possible ridicule from their peers and fear of a more public retaliation during the height of Abstract Expressionism, these artists chose to refrain from making overt artistic references to their bedroom proclivities.[73] Rauschenberg briefly studied under Siskind at Black Mountain College in 1951 and credits him with a certain amount of mentorship, both technically and fraternally.[74] Cy Twombly, whom Siskind had known from their shared years at CCNY, owes a debt of gratitude to Siskind for staging his first show in Chicago after the same interactions at Black Mountain College. Johns' relation to Siskind was tangential and

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[71]Vettel-Becker, *Shooting from the Hip* (2005), 44.
[72] In 1941, Siskind applied for service but was deemed unfit after his initial interview was marred by extreme and visible anxiety evident in his inability to properly sign an application for enlistment form due to the trembling of his hands. [Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 44].
[73] Lucie-Smith, *Adam* (1998), 163.
[74] Branden W. Joseph, "The Gap and the Frame," *October* 117 (Summer 2006): 60-67.

passing, though they would have been acquainted during the frequent trips Siskind made to New York and the photographer's continued relationship with other Abstract Expressionist artists.[75]

While these Abstract Expressionist artists closeted their sexuality from representation and instead only allowed abstract and by extension unreadable meanings within their works, the photographer Minor White repressed all urges in search of the mystic and spiritual.[76] White could have easily gone down the road of other contemporaries such as George Platt Lynes. Instead, White chose to suppress his desires both physically and professionally.

As evidence of this mode of suppression, we can look to a letter by Minor White written in 1962. He had received a collection of photographs from an eager admirer and hopeful photographer. White overtly states that the images trouble him, not because of their quality, but rather because of their frank sexuality and representation:

> Your photographs are still mirrors of yourself. In other words your images are raw, the emotions naked. To present these to others they need appropriate clothes. These are private images not public ones. They are "expressive" meaning a direct mirror of yourself rather than "creative" meaning so converted as to affect others as mirrors of themselves.[77]

White believed that the photographs revealed too much and do not allow for the audience of these works to place their own experiences onto the picture plane. They were not universal but instead intimate and therefore unsuccessful. This idea of the universal was of monument importance to the majority of Abstract Expressionists as well as to Siskind

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[75] The relationships formed between Siskind and known homosexual or at the very least bisexual Abstract Expressionist artists and photographers do not mean to suggest that Siskind wound up in the broom-closet with any of them. Rather it serves as evidence to the photographer's more blasé attitude to issues of sexuality at large. Siskind's own personal struggles with matters of sex could make him more sympathetic to others own struggles. His failed marriages, marked in large part by sexual failings and the suppression of his own desires, weighed heavily on him. Likewise, the suppression of sexuality for Twombly, White, et al. serves as an impetus for their work as well as a resulting absence of marked sexual subject matter [Lucie-Smith, *Adam* (1998), 163].

[76] Paul Martineau, *Minor White: Manifestations of the Spirit* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2014), 14-17.

[77] Ibid., 18.

himself. While they saw the connection between the personal through an extension of their own psyches, expressed through either paint or light-sensitive material, they wanted to leave the experience open to interpretation.

That Siskind shared a similar mantra for photography's capacity and held a respected position as photography instructor would suggest that he would be welcomed into the photographic community. Similar to his alienation within Abstract Expressionism, however, Siskind's relationship to the photographic community was also questioned. Minor White questioned his role in photographic history, worrying that it may affect the general reception of the medium as its own form of fine art. By blurring the lines between painting, or more strongly mimicking painting, White saw Siskind's attempt at something profound to be "incomplete."[78] For Siskind, who considered his photographs to be the antithesis of incompleteness, it is no wonder that he felt isolated among the flock. White and Siskind, though never having a specific relationship to each other, were admirers of each other and mutually benefited professionally through a similar formal aspect of their work. Though the aim of each photographer's work was different, both relied on the flat photographic picture plane as a window into other worlds.[79] Rather than viewing photography as documentation, they instead followed the notion of equivalence, albeit for much different aims. [80]

In the series *Pleasures and Terrors of Levitation,* Siskind aimed not to document muscular locomotion. Instead, he saw the depiction of bodies as a formal representation of the solid and the ethereal (or rather the corporeal and therefore earthly with the

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[78] Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 103.
[79] White wanted to represent the personal and spiritual through abstraction while Siskind wished to express the dualism inherent in all of existence through formal execution.
[80] "'Equivalence' pertains to the photograph itself, the visible foundations of any potential visual experience with the photograph itself. Oddly enough, this does not mean that a photograph, which functions as an Equivalent, has a certain appearance, or style, or trend, or fashion. Equivalence is a function, an experience, not a thing. Any photograph, regardless of source, might function as an Equivalent to someone, sometime, someplace. If the individual viewer realizes that for him what he sees in a picture corresponds to something within himself—that is, the photograph mirrors something in himself—then his experience is some degree of Equivalence." Minor White, "Equivalence: The Perennial Trend." *PSA Journal* 29, no. 7 (1963): 17-21.

incorporeality of the sky). The notion of levitation itself denotes a form of tension, contradiction, and duality evoking notions of the mystical and magical.[81] The human body was intended to stay on the ground, and yet the idea of levitation suggests an ability to break with the laws of physics through a transportation of mind over matter. Ignoring for a moment this Cartesian manifestation's break with physical reality, the more existential question of human duality can also be seen in *Bill Lipkind 10*.[8283] Though the photograph does contain a representation of nature (another duality of sorts in relation to man and nature and man's troubled place within a wild environment), such representation is diminished by Siskind's use of focus. The shrubs that we read as forefront in the image are a result of Siskind focusing on Lipkind's legs in close proximity rather than any wish to depict the trueness of plant life. Siskind could have easily focused his lens, bringing foreground and background into equal sharpness. Once the eye moves past the foreground focus, the landscape becomes a field of tonalities akin to Mark Rothko's mature style of the late 1950s.[84] This color field may serve the same contrast as that of the empty sky in *The Pleasures and Terrors of Levitation* series, which Siskind continued to work on until 1961. Furthermore, the presence of form set against a negative field of tonality suggests Siskind's interest in the duality of existence.

This existence deals with not only man's relationship to nature, but also man's isolation within the greater whole. Always part of but never one with, man is both part of the machine and just a single cog within its workings. As a representation of self, posed through the universal, Siskind was exploring his own alienation within the world.[85] We can

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[81] Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 101.
[82] Cartesian here stands for Rene Descartes's theory on the separation between mind and body, or the spirit and the corporeal.
[83] Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism* (1993), 246-247.
[84] For an example of such work, see Mark Rothko's *Untitled* (1950-52). T04148. Tate Modern, London, UK.
[85] Chiarenza, *Pleasures and Terrors* (1982), 101.

read *Bill Lipkind 10* as the expressed tension of within and without, corporeal but ungrounded. Lipkind's feet are not present within the picture frame and therefore the symbol of grounding and connection to the real is severed. Like the levitating bodies of *Pleasures and Terrors,* Lipkind stands (no pun intended) in as a representation of that separation.

Furthermore, we can read into the representation of the male form through formal castration as a photographic realization of Siskind's own professional castration. The body, fragmented and without phallus, connotes a sense of incompleteness much like Minor White's views of Siskind's work. Interestingly, the representation of the incomplete in turn completes the image, thereby resolving the tension within the photograph. *Bill Lipkind 10* can be seen as formal representations of Siskind's own struggle to find a source of power that he was never able to fully find within his own communities.

RESOLVING THE TENSION

Through a careful consideration of a single photograph, this paper posits a new reading out of multiple possible interpretations. Aaron Siskind's alliance with the Abstract Expressionist movement greatly informs the form and construction of *Bill Lipkind 10,* while at the same time his choice of a nude male, a close and personal friend, warrants a reading outside of his own particular biography. The tools for such diacritically opposed readings are all there; they only need to be broken from their confines of strict gender segregation.

The problematic placement of Siskind's *Bill Lipkind 10* within a consideration of the male gaze and form illuminates the need for further analysis of other seemingly forgotten works. Though an outlier of sorts, this image of a heterosexual subject by a heterosexual artist is not alone in the archive of representation. In order to understand more fully such representations, the traditional lenses of consideration must be expanded. A reading of an image based on segregations of sexuality frames such readings through a gendered language and fails to recognize the complexity of visual culture. There has been progress and the field of literature has expanded greatly due in large part to feminist and queer theorists and historians; however, there is still much room to grow.

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